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Demographic statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2016/220 and past practices, presents activities carried out by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in the area of demographic statistics. It provides a summary of the implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme over the past year, with a focus on the development of methodological guidelines for the management of population and housing censuses and the preparation of guidelines on the use of contemporary technologies for the forthcoming population and housing census round. It provides information on activities relating to the promotion of the revised set of international statistical standards for civil registration and vital statistics and the ongoing work on developing a handbook focusing on the operations and management of civil registration and vital statistics systems. It also provides information on the collection of demographic statistics through the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires and on activities relating to capacity-building in the area of international migration statistics.

The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2016/220 and past practices, presents activities carried out by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in the area of demographic statistics. It provides a summary of the implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme over the past year, with a focus on the development of methodological guidelines for the management of population and housing censuses and the preparation of guidelines on the use of contemporary technologies for the forthcoming population and housing census round. It provides information on activities relating to the promotion of the revised set of international statistical standards for civil registration and vital statistics and the ongoing work on developing a handbook focusing on the operations and management of civil registration and vital statistics systems. It also provides information on the collection of demographic statistics through the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires and on activities relating to capacity-building in the area of international migration statistics.

II. 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme

2. The 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme was approved by the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session and endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2015/10. The Programme serves as recognition that population and housing censuses are among the main sources of data for effective development planning and objective decision-making, especially in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Programme is aimed at ensuring that each Member State conducts a population and housing census at least once during the period 2015-2024 and disseminates the resulting census statistics on population and housing in as comprehensive and holistic a manner as possible.

3. In that context, the Statistics Division undertook to revise and update the major international statistical standard for population and housing censuses, the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, and the third revision of this set of principles and recommendations was adopted by the Statistical Commission at its forty-six session.

4. Building on those principles and recommendations and as indicated in the previous report to the Statistical Commission, the Statistics Division organized and conducted an expert group meeting to review and update the major accompanying volume, the *Handbook on Census Management for Population and Housing Censuses*. The work on this manual has been finalized and the renamed *Handbook on the Management of Population and Housing Censuses* is now available online.[1]

5. The 2020 round of population and housing censuses will be heavily influenced by recent technological developments in many related areas. In that context, the Statistics Division organized a technical meeting in Amman from 28 November to 1 December 2016 on the use of technology in population and housing censuses. The

[1] Available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/seriesF/Series_F83Rev2en.pdf.

technical meeting, which was the first activity to be conducted as part of the planning of projects under the tenth tranche of the United Nations Development Account, was aimed at enhancing the capacity of national statistical offices to meet the data demands arising from the monitoring of progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The proceedings of the meeting will be condensed and presented in a separate volume as an appendix to the *Handbook on Census Management for Population and Housing Censuses*, thereby providing a more flexible option for updating its content as new technological solutions for population and housing censuses emerge.

6. The Statistics Division will, as in previous rounds, organize workshops to promote the revised principles and recommendations and other methodological materials, targeting all regions. Detailed schedules, subject matter and information on participating countries and partners will be regularly posted to the website of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme.[2]

7. In 2016, staff members of the Statistics Division provided technical assistance by serving on the international advisory boards for the 2013 population and housing census of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the 2014 population and housing census of Myanmar.

8. In response to Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/10 on the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme and the request therein to ensure coordination of activities among stakeholders in assisting Member States, the Statistics Division, together with the United Nations Population Fund and the United States Census Bureau, established the International Committee on Census Coordination in 2016.[3] The objectives of the Committee include, among others, to proactively review the population and housing census activities anticipated for the 2020 census round, identify countries in need of support and collaborate to provide support in census planning, implementation and analysis, as well as in the utilization and dissemination of census results.

III. Implementation of the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*

9. After the endorsement of the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3* by the Statistical Commission at its forty-fifth session, the Statistics Division undertook regional and subregional workshops to introduce and promote the revised set of international standards for civil registration and vital statistics. The workshops were held in Guatemala, New Caledonia and Oman, with the participation of representatives of 50 countries and more than 75 statisticians, civil registrars and public health professionals. Detailed information on and the reports of the workshops are available on the Division's website, as are the schedules and subject matter for the workshops planned for 2017.

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[2] See http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/wphc/default.htm.

[3] For more information on the Committee, see http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/icec/default.html.

10. The Statistics Division has initiated the revision of the *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics: Management, Operation and Maintenance* and is expected to hold an expert group meeting in February 2017 to review the first draft, in conjunction with a consultative meeting to discuss the methods for assessing completeness and quality of civil registration and the resulting vital statistics. The resulting revision of the handbook on management, therefore, will be accompanied by the development of contemporary approaches and methods for evaluating the completeness of civil registration and the quality of vital statistics.

11. The Division continues to serve as the secretariat for the Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Group and maintains the accompanying website, which provides information on the activities of all members of the Group relating to the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics. The Group met three times in 2016, in March, July and October, and discussed various projects and programmes carried out by members of the Group, thereby ensuring a coordinated approach to and the use of international standards and recommendations.

IV. Collection of statistics through the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires

12. The Statistics Division collects, compiles and disseminates annually official demographic and social statistics for all countries and areas of the world. The data are collected through a set of annual and census-date questionnaires dispatched to national statistical offices.[4] Data were collected on several aspects of population distribution and composition, including the population of cities and urban agglomerations, fertility, mortality, nuptiality, annual migration flows, migrant stock, household characteristics, housing characteristics, economic characteristics and levels of education. The traditional form of dissemination is the *Demographic Yearbook* collection, published annually since 1948.[5]

13. The following overview focuses on the availability of vital statistics collected from national statistical offices, which is measured as the availability of the main datasets for each vital event published in the *Demographic Yearbook 2015*, which is the latest published issue.[6] Appendix II contains a table presenting the availability of each listed dataset in terms of the number of countries or areas that submitted data published in the *Demographic Yearbook 2015* as a percentage of the total number of countries or areas of the world.

14. Broadly speaking, the availability of a vital statistic is measured as the percentage of the total number of countries or areas of the world submitting relevant data. For the vital statistics presented in the *Demographic Yearbook 2015*, that availability was as follows (in descending order): live births by urban or rural residence (74 per cent); deaths by urban or rural residence (72 per cent); live births

[4] Census-date questionnaires collect statistics on population and housing census topics and are dispatched to each country or area according to the census date of each country or area.

[5] The *Demographic Yearbook* is available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2.htm. Demographic data, especially population and housing census data, are also incrementally published online to the UNdata portal at http://data.un.org/.

[6] Available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2015.htm.

by age of mother and sex of child, and deaths by age and sex (63 per cent for each); marriages by urban or rural residence (58 per cent); infant deaths by urban or rural residence (52 per cent); infant deaths by age and sex (48 per cent); divorces by urban or rural residence (47 per cent); marriages by age of groom and by age of bride (46 per cent); live births by age of father, and late fetal deaths by urban or rural residence (37 per cent for each); legally induced abortions (27 per cent); and legally induced abortions by age of woman (22 per cent).

15. As presented, around three quarters of the total number of countries or areas of the world have submitted to the United Nations overall statistics on total births and deaths. The share steadily decreases, however, with the introduction of additional variables, such as age, and for other units of vital statistics enumeration, such as fetal deaths.

V. Activities related to migration statistics

16. Since 2014, the Statistics Division has conducted a number of workshops for countries in Africa and Asia in collaboration with key partners, including the United Nations Population Division, the International Organization for Migration, the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States and the regional commissions of the United Nations, including the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.[7] The workshops have been aimed at strengthening the technical capacity of government officials to produce and analyse migration data from all relevant sources and to use migration data in the formulation of national migration policies and development plans. They have covered issues such as United Nations standards and definitions for collecting international migration data, data sources and indicators to measure the migration-related targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Participants have also discussed ways and means to exchange data on international migration in order to assess the size, characteristics and potential contributions of migrants residing abroad.

17. Given the fact that labour mobility is an important dimension of international migration, in 2016 the Statistics Division joined a task force on measuring labour mobility led by the Economic Commission for Europe. The task force aims to review concepts, definitions and methodologies related to labour mobility in countries and to develop practical guidance on the compilation of labour mobility statistics. The Division also joined the Expert Group on Refugee Statistics, the establishment of which was endorsed in decision 47/111 of the Statistical Commission.[8] The Expert Group, led by Statistics Norway, Eurostat and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, intends to develop a set of international recommendations on refugee statistics by 2018 as a reference guide for national and international work concerning statistics on refugees and asylum seekers.

18. In response to the request made by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-eighth session, the Statistics Division has produced a handbook on measuring

[7] The list of workshops is presented in annex I.

[8] See E/2016/24-E/CN.3/2016/34, chap. III, sect. B.

international migration through population censuses. A draft of the handbook, incorporating comments from international experts, was reviewed and tested at the workshops for countries in Africa during the period 2014-2016 and will be reviewed and tested for countries in Asia in January 2017. The handbook will help statisticians to: (a) better understand the concepts and definitions related to international migration; (b) identify key information needed to better measure migration and relevant data sources; and (c) produce more internationally comparable data on stocks and flows of migrants as well as their characteristics using direct and indirect methods as part of population censuses. With respect to methodological development, the Division has also contributed to the development of a handbook aimed at providing guidance for producers and users of international migration statistics on the incorporation of such statistics into national migration planning strategies. The handbook is a joint product of the members of the Global Migration Group.

VI. Action required by the Statistical Commission

19. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the present report.

Annex I

List of migration statistics workshops

1. Workshop on strengthening the collection and use of international migration data for development for sub-Saharan African countries, held in Addis Ababa from 18 to 21 November 2014

2. Workshop on strengthening the collection and use of international migration data for development for the countries of northern and western Africa, held in Dakar from 8 to 11 September 2015

3. Regional workshop on migration data collection and management in West Africa, held in Lomé from 15 to18 March 2016

4. National migration data management workshop, held in in Cape Coast, Ghana, from 25 to 29 July 2016

5. Interregional workshop on collecting and using migration-related data for development: cooperation and exchange in the European-African corridor, held in Rome from 30 November to 2 December 2016

6. Regional workshop on strengthening the collection and use of international migration data in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for countries in southern Asia, to be held in Bangkok from 31 January to 3 February 2017

Annex II

Availability of vital statistics

Item	*Number of countries/areas submitting data*	*Percentage of total number of countries/areas*
Fertility		
Live births by urban or rural residence	175	74
Live births by age of mother and sex of child	151	63
Live births by age of father	89	37
Fetal mortality		
Late fetal deaths by urban or rural residence	89	37
Legally induced abortions	65	27
Legally induced abortions by age of woman	52	22
Infant mortality		
Infant deaths by urban or rural residence	124	52
Infant deaths by age and sex	115	48
General mortality		
Deaths by urban or rural residence	172	72
Deaths by age and sex	150	63
Nuptiality and divorce		
Marriages by urban or rural residence	138	58
Marriages by age of groom and by age of bride	110	46
Divorces by urban or rural residence	113	47

Source: United Nations *Demographic Yearbook 2015* synoptic table.